



# Living Healthy Working Well

## Overcoming Anxiety During Times of War

Even though the war in Iraq seems to be winding down, anxiety levels are still running high as we wonder what will happen next, we miss loved ones who are still serving in the military, and we deal with the uncertainties of the future, both in Iraq and in our country. This kind of anxiety is expected, but even so, if it's not kept under control it can interfere with your daily life.

### What is anxiety?

Anxiety can be a feeling of apprehension, dread, or fear over a real or imagined threat to your well-being. Some amount of anxiety at times is normal. However, if the anxiety you are experiencing seems out of proportion to the actual risk, or if it is overwhelming and getting in the way of your daily life, the following tips may help:

- **Talk to someone.** Talk about your fears and anxieties with someone you trust.
- **Turn off the TV.** While it's important to keep up with the latest developments on what's happening in Iraq, non-stop viewing can add to anxiety.
- **Eat healthy foods.** Eat at regular times, and don't skip meals.
- **Limit caffeine after lunchtime.** Too much caffeine can make you edgy and anxious. Drink decaffeinated coffee or tea, caffeine free sodas, or better yet, water. Avoid chocolate.
- **Avoid nicotine and alcohol.** They both contain chemicals that can cause or heighten anxiety.
- **Exercise regularly.** Physical activity, whether it's a full workout or a 20-minute walk, helps melt away stress and anxiety. Add relaxation exercises such as deep breathing, visualization, or meditation to your daily routine.
- **Don't over commit yourself.** Trying to accomplish too much with too little time is a sure-fire way to bring on anxiety, especially during these stressful times.

### Common emotional reactions to war

The *National Mental Health Association* identifies the following as normal emotional reactions to the war or threats of terrorism:

- Disbelief and shock
- Fear and anxiety about the future
- Difficulty making decisions or concentrating
- Inability to focus
- Apathy and emotional numbing
- Irritability and anger
- Sadness and depression
- Feeling powerless
- Changes in eating patterns, loss of appetite, or overeating
- Difficulty sleeping

However, if these feelings become overwhelming or begin to interfere with your daily life, you may want to seek professional help.

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# Calming Anxiety About the War through Self-Education

Americans and people around the world have been glued to their televisions and radios listening to what's going on in Iraq, and news about what may happen next. During these times of fact, speculation, and rumor, it is important for individuals to take responsibility for self-education about the war. If we are not careful, we could unintentionally add to our own anxiety.

## Confirm what you read and what you hear

News organizations usually attempt to confirm sources. But occasionally, their reports either contain inaccuracies or are simply incorrect. This means you need to take responsibility for confirming the source or the validity of the information before you regard it as truth. This can be done in a few ways:

- If the report was given via television or radio, switch to another news station to see if the same story is being broadcast.
- Check legitimate online news sites to confirm reports, including the Associated Press.

- Read between the lines and don't make assumptions. Sometimes conclusions are drawn by newscasters or by viewers. Pay attention to the details. If something isn't explicitly stated, then it's smart to be wary of what is being implied – at least until the facts come out.

- Other trustworthy sources for confirmation are government agencies. For example, for information regarding threats of bio-chemical warfare check with the Center for Disease Control and Prevention at [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov).



## Speculation can feed anxiety

Speculation can cloud reality. Just because someone suspects something may happen does not prove its validity. Reflect for a moment on the frenzy surrounding Y2K. There was speculation that non-compliant computers would stop functioning and that city-wide

blackouts would occur when entire power grids went down. But in the end, there was very little if any disruption to our lives. This same kind of speculation, rumors, and second or third-hand reports about war activities often do no more than fuel anxiety unnecessarily.

Remaining calm and sensible will help keep the current situation in perspective. It's smart to take basic steps to prepare and to educate yourself before believing or acting upon everything you hear or read.



## Remember . . .

Your Employee Assistance Program (EAP) is available to you and your eligible dependents. EAP counselors are available 24 hours a day, seven days a week, to discuss your concerns and provide confidential assistance at no cost to you. As part of your EAP, you now have access to MagellanAssist. Visit today at <http://www.dpa.ca.gov/benefits/other/eap/Assist.shtm>

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